



# *Iowa Outdoors*

Iowa Department of Natural Resources  
**www.iowadnr.com**

**www.iowanaturestore.com**

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**Nov. 21, 2006**

1. Still Plenty of Pheasants For Hunters Willing to Change Their Ways – by Lowell Washburn [electronic photos available]
2. Landowners and Tenants Encouraged to Register On-line
3. DNR Takes First Step Towards Resort State Park
4. Neil Smith Bike Trail to Close Temporarily Nov. 30
5. County Antlerless Deer Tags Going, Going... Gone
6. The Business of Pheasant Hunting – by Joe Wilkinson
7. Give a Gift that Keeps on Growing

[electronic photo available]

## **STILL PLENTY OF PHEASANTS FOR HUNTERS WILLING TO CHANGE THEIR WAYS**

By Lowell Washburn  
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

As far as pheasant cover goes, the place doesn't look like much. Just a narrow line of mashed down barbed wire, rusty fence posts, and a three-foot-wide strip of grassy vegetation interspersed here and there by patches of giant ragweed. Most of the line has been removed for crops. Less than a hundred yards of the old fence still remains.

Not exactly the sort of place you'd put on your list of Hot Spot Pheasant Valhallas. Stuck in the middle of nowhere and a good half mile from the nearest block of "real" bird habitat, the fence line appears so desolate that most self respecting hunters don't even let off the gas pedal as they pass by. That's probably one of the reasons why I'm rarely disappointed whenever I hunt here.

Although narrow band fence lines are easily hunted alone, it's always more fun when you bring a friend. My companion for this outing was a Labrador retriever named Tucker.

Actually, I was dog sitting and the retriever really belongs to my son, Matt.

Although chiefly a water dog, Tucker also knows the drill when it comes to upland birds. Once a rooster is scented, the eight-year-old rarely fails to eventually ferret out his quarry. With last night's frost still melting on the grass and cornstalks, it was a perfect morning for birds to put down some good scent. If there were pheasants about, I was confident we'd find them. As Tucker bolted from the tailgate, I checked my watch. 8:58 a.m.

Less than three minutes down the line, Tucker's rapidly wagging tail and distinct change in body language told me the Lab was "makin' game". The scent appeared to be getting hotter by the second when the retriever suddenly did an abrupt right face and hit the brakes.

There was a sudden cackle, a whirr of wings, and the rooster was airborne. The shot was nothing short of a bird hunter's dream --- 15 yards, wide open, crossing to the left. I shouldered my gun and fired. The bird crumpled as it collided with the charge of 28 gauge #6's. Even I can make shots like that one.

Forty yards farther and the dog was gamy again. A second rooster exploded and was brought to bag. Seconds later, a third rooster erupted. The range on this bird was marginal, and I decided to pass. Another forty paces and we were at the end of the fence line. It was 9:08. Three roosters flushed and two in the bag. Not bad for a ten minute hunt on the weekend before Thanksgiving.

Hard to believe, but it is late November. Iowa pheasants have been hunted and hunted hard for nearly a month now. Most of the dumb ones have made their way to the frying pan and the survivors have learned to avoid humans and their dogs. One of the best ways for roosters to accomplish this feat is to go where hunters don't. High on their list of favorite haunts are those seemingly barren fence lines, overgrown rock piles, and poorly drained low spots where crop fields have turned to weeds.

Although many of these habitats may take less than ten minutes to hunt, they often produce as many roosters in those ten minutes as a gunner could locate during an entire morning of hunting larger, more traditional blocks of cover.

For a lot of Iowa pheasant hunters, the 2006 hunting season has already been a good one. Unfortunately, many of those same folks are becoming discouraged over not finding many birds during recent outings.

The truth of the matter is that there are still plenty of roosters dotting our rural landscapes. They've just changed their ways. To continue to put roast pheasant on the dinner table -- hunters need to do the same.

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## **LANDOWNERS AND TENANTS ENCOURAGED TO REGISTER ON-LINE**

BOONE – Landowners and tenants who plan to hunt during the shotgun deer seasons but have not yet registered for reduced-fee licenses, should plan to do so online at [www.iowadnr.com](http://www.iowadnr.com). By registering online, landowners and tenants may obtain their reduced-fee deer licenses immediately.

The DNR will continue to accept Landowner/Tenant forms sent through the mail, but cannot guarantee these forms will be processed by the start of shotgun deer season.

“Keep in mind that mistakes or omissions on the form will delay processing the registration,” said Steve Roberts, with the Iowa DNR wildlife bureau. “The most common errors are a missing number or an invalid parcel identification number. Another error is trying to register more than one person on a single form.”

Registrants who are uncertain of their parcel identification number should contact their county treasurer or assessor. As of Monday afternoon, 39,636 Iowans have registered land as a landowner or tenant to obtain reduced-fee licenses.

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## **DNR TAKES FIRST STEP TOWARDS RESORT STATE PARK**

DES MOINES – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources will be accepting bids for construction of the Honey Creek Resort State Park, at Lake Rathbun, through Dec. 7. This initial set of construction plans is primarily for earthwork and site preparation for the golf course, roads and building sites.

A pre-bid meeting is scheduled for 9 a.m., Nov. 27, at the park site, about 5.5 miles west of Moravia on county road J18, in Appanoose County. Plans are available as a .pdf online at <http://csbweb.igsb.uiowa.edu/csb/>, then click on projects. To request a paper copy of the plans and specifications, contact the DNR at 515-281-6313. The deadline to submit a bid is 3 p.m., Dec. 7.

A second construction package will be released for bid in mid February. That work would include construction of the lodge/conference center, 28 cabins, RV campground and more.

The anticipated grand opening of Honey Creek Resort State Park is Memorial Day Weekend 2008.

**For more information, contact Mike Broderick, facilities engineer, at 515-281-0873.**

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## **NEIL SMITH BIKE TRAIL TO CLOSE TEMPORARILY NOV. 30**

DES MOINES – The Neil Smith Bike Trail will be closed north of I-80/35 from Nov. 30 through Dec. 3 to install new piping for the Ankeny water treatment plant, weather permitting.

“We had hoped to avoid a weekend with having the bike path closed, but we will need that extra time to allow the concrete to cure adequately,” said Kim Olofson, manager of Big Creek State Park. “By completing the work this time of year, we are hopeful to minimize any inconvenience.”

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## **COUNTY ANTLERLESS DEER TAGS GOING, GOING...GONE**

County-specific antlerless deer tags are disappearing, as hunters head into the later days of bow season and prepare for the two big shotgun deer seasons in December.

As of Monday morning, only 37 counties had antlerless tags remaining from their quotas. Many tags were snapped up since November 12, the first day for hunters to purchase November shotgun tags, for use on the three days after Thanksgiving. Until last year, only bowhunting was allowed during that period. Prior to November 12, hunters were limited to three county antlerless tags.

Many of the counties with antlerless tags remaining are in deer-heavy southern, southwestern and northeast Iowa. To view a list of counties with remaining tags, go to [www.iowadnr.com](http://www.iowadnr.com), click on hunting, then on white tailed deer, then on availability of limited quota licenses in the left hand column, then finally on resident antlerless deer by county. Other special hunts; urban areas, parks and in other high-deer corridors still have tags available. There were no antlerless tags offered this year in 21 north central and northwest Iowa counties.

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## **THE BUSINESS OF PHEASANT HUNTING**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

That raspy cackle of another flushing rooster is music to the ears of a pheasant hunter. It also plays well on Main Street in small towns across Iowa.

There may not be as much activity as in past years. However, from late October to early winter, pheasant hunting spawns its own tourist season. "It's a working vacation. I'm very tired from walking yesterday," laughed Chip Elbe, as his group stepped into a section of rolling switchgrass near West Branch earlier this month. "And we're at it again today."

Elbe, from Cedarburg, Wis., has been coming to Iowa for more than 30 years. "We stay at a motel in Cedar Rapids. We're spending our money, so we're keeping the economy going, hopefully." He estimates that he and three companions drop \$300 to \$500 each during their fall hunting trip. That's money spent on motel rooms, meals, entertainment and last minute hunting needs.

"The first couple weeks, we get a lot of them," agrees Gordon Olberding, owner of the Hawkeye Motel, on the west edge of Washington. "November has always been our best month of the year; primarily due to hunters." Olberding sees it taper off, then pick up around Thanksgiving, and again in the last 10 days of the season. "We have the same guys coming back year after year. It's always good to see them," he notes.

However, it's not always business as usual. "It's not like it was ten, 15 years ago. It used to be a *big* deal," observes Great Outdoor Traditions storeowner Matt Schrantz, in Cedar Rapids. In that period, pheasant numbers have dipped. Biologists forecast 130,000 hunters in Iowa will shoot about 750,000 ringnecks this year, down 38 percent from the long-term (40-year) trend in Iowa. A better than expected opener boosted expectations. However, the number of birds is still a factor. Though not seeing a big pre-season boom, business still picks up as the last Saturday in October approaches. "Blaze orange vests and hats. They're buying those; brush pants. Footwear sales are always strong," clicks off Schrantz. "Then, there's always an extra gun or two for pheasant hunters."

Those same hunters shop in small town hardware stores, sporting goods outlets and restaurants. Some businesses cater to the crowd. Olberding, for instance, has a stainless steel bird cleaning room at his motel. He'll freeze birds for them to take home. Hunting dogs have an inside facility for overnight stays. "Some hunters drive 60 miles from where they hunt. It's a busy season for us."

Sometimes, the towns are not so small. The Governor's Pheasant Hunt, last weekend, helped fill one Cedar Rapids hotel and kept caterers and restaurants busy feeding 50-plus hunters. Many came from out of state; some getting their first taste of Iowa hunting. Bob Hattaway, who has hunted across half the world, was all smiles after bringing down his first pheasant, on the last drive of the day. He made arrangements to have it mounted and shipped to him in Florida.

And each hunter has his or her own reason for enjoying a late fall day in an Iowa farm field. "I love watching the dogs work. It's just phenomenal what they were bred for

in life,” admits Elbe, from Wisconsin. “The fella we hunt with has a fabulous dog, Zeke; probably the best dog I’ve ever hunted over. The memories we have of him are just fantastic!”

Like Zeke, Elbe admits he’s getting a little older, but he’ll keep coming back to Iowa. For him...*that’s* where the birds are.

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## **GIVE A GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GROWING**

AMES - The Iowa Department of Natural Resources forestry bureau has created a set of gift packets of native trees and shrubs available this holiday season. The Iowa State Forest Nurseries in Ames and Montrose raise high quality native tree and shrub conservation seedlings for Iowa residents to plant on their lands, whether it is a backyard, small acreage or larger landholding.

To promote and encourage the planting of more native trees and shrubs for songbird and wildlife habitat, State Foresters have designed with the help of several environmental and sportsmen’s organizations five (5) packets of native trees and shrubs seedlings for people to purchase this holiday season.

- Songbird Packet – 20 trees (8 to 24 inches tall) for \$20 (includes shipping) designed for a larger backyard habitat project. The Songbird Packet includes two bur oaks, two white pines, four wild plum, four chokecherry, four gray dogwoods and four service berry and is recommended by Audubon Iowa.
- Turkey Packet – 200 trees (8 to 24 inches tall) for \$90. This Turkey packet provides need mast trees for that one-half to one-acre planting and includes 50 bur oak, 50 white oak, 50 pin oak and 50 gray dogwoods and is recommended by the Iowa Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation.
- Pheasant Packet – 200 trees (8 to 24 inches tall) for \$90. This Pheasant packet provides food and winter cover and includes 50 redcedar, 50 wild plums, 50 ninebark and 50 gray dogwoods and is recommended by the Iowa Pheasants Forever chapters.
- Quail Packet – 200 trees (8 to 24 inches tall) for \$90. This Quail packet provides food and winter cover and includes 100 wild plum and 100 gray dogwood and is recommended by DNR Wildlife Biologists.
- Create Your Own Packet – 200 trees (8 to 24 inches tall) for \$90. You can choose up to four different species available in units of 50 plants for your own special wildlife design.

Shipping for larger packets directly to gift recipients' door in the spring is \$10 per packet (shipping is included with the Songbird Packet price) or they can pick it up directly from the State Nursery in late April to mid May at no charge.

To receive this holiday gift certificate in time for the holidays, place your order via the phone, e-mail or mail by Dec. 20. When you order, the State Nursery will send a gift certificate to the recipient and identify whom the gift was from. You could also give yourself this gift that keeps on growing makes a wonderful house warming gift.

To order or for more information about the packets and gift certificate, call the State Forest Nursery at 1-800-865-2477 or go on line to [www.iowadnr.com/forestry/](http://www.iowadnr.com/forestry/)

Please help expand songbird and wildlife habitat for today and for tomorrow by giving a gift that keeps growing.

**For more information, contact Roger Jacob, manager, State Forest Nursery in Ames, at 515-233-2357.**

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